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ABSTRACT

The roles that school counselors play in schools can vary from school to school, from school district to district, and from state to state. To be effective in their positions as highly trained counseling and human development specialists, school counselors must be clear about their scope of practice. National standards for school counseling programs provide a strong foundation for school counselors to mold a comprehensive scope of practice that can be applied in different schools, districts, and states, that focuses on: academic development, career development, and personal/social development. The author proposes that a thorough understanding of one's preparation and training as a school counselor and developing and implementing a comprehensive school counseling program are crucial to creating and solidifying the scope of practice of a school counselor. (GCP)

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Running Head: School Counselors' Scope of Practice

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A General Scope of Practice for Professional School Counselors

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General Scope of Practice for Professional School Counselors

School counselors are professionally trained counselors who complete graduate level training that prepares them to work as specialists in school and educational settings (CACREP, 2001). The roles that school counselors play in schools can vary from school to school, from school district to district, and from state to state. To be effective in their positions as highly trained counseling and human development specialists school counselors must be clear about their scope of practice. Coy and Sears (1991) simply define "scope of practice" as the responsibilities for which one is trained. Counselor education prepares school counselors in a broad manner but is also grounded in a number of core areas including: professional identity, social & cultural diversity, human growth and development, career development, helping relationships, group work, assessment, research and program evaluation, foundations of school counseling, contextual dimensions of school counseling, knowledge and skill requirements for school counselors (CACREP, 2001).

School counselors must examine their scope of practice first by understanding the strengths and limitations of their training. Once this happens, then they can begin to exert influence over their scope of practice by utilizing their strengths and designing and implementing a comprehensive school counseling program (Gysbers & Henderson, 1997) based on national standards (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Sears (1993) reports that school counselors can contribute more to students' success if they commit to designing and implementing a skills based counseling program. The national standards for school counseling programs outlined by Campbell and Dahir (1997) provide a strong foundation for school counselors to utilize their training and experience to mold a comprehensive

scope of practice that can be applied in different schools, districts and states, that focuses on:

- academic development
- career development
- and personal/social development

A thorough understanding of ones preparation and training as a school counselor and developing and implementing a comprehensive school counseling program are crucial to creating and solidifying the scope of practice of a school counselor. It is also important to objectify what exactly a school counselor's scope of practice consists of and its boundaries. A number of resources were used to develop the following general definition of a school counselor's scope of practice (Arkansas Board of Examiners in Counseling Rules & Regulations, 1997; Campbell & Dahir, 1997; CACREP 2001; Counselor and Social Worker Law, 1997; Coy & Sears, 1991; Gysbers & Henderson, 1997; Schmidt, 1999; Sears, 1993).

The practice of professional school counseling is: providing counseling services to individuals, groups, organizations, or the general public through the auspices of an educational setting involving the application of counseling principles, methods or procedures to assist students in their academic, career and personal/social development and adjustment. Counseling principles, methods or procedures means an approach to counseling that emphasizes the school counselor's role in systematically assisting students though all of the following:

- Counseling – assisting individual students or groups of students, through the counseling relationship, to develop understanding of personal problems, to define

goals, and to develop a plan of action reflecting his/her/their interests, abilities, aptitudes and needs as these are related to healthy academic, career and personal/social development.

- Guidance – assisting individual students or groups of students through psycho-educational curriculum presentations consisting of broad goals and objectives for a specified target population and is, ideally, integrated cooperatively into classroom instruction by both teachers and school counselors.
- Assessment
  - Student
    - Objective - selecting, administering, scoring and interpreting instruments designed to assess students' aptitudes, attitudes, abilities, achievements, interests, developmental and emotional characteristics
    - Utilizing professional knowledge, credible professional judgement and accepted theory to understand the needs of a student and render a course of action to best meets these needs which may include school counseling services or referral to a specialist.
  - Program – selecting, administering, interpreting instruments designed to assess the outcomes of a comprehensive school counseling program.
- Consulting – interpreting or reporting fact, theory or credible professional judgement to provide assistance in solving current or potential problems of individual students, groups of students, parents, teachers or administration.
- Referral - is the evaluation of data and circumstances to identify problems and determine the advisability of referral to other specialists.

- Coordination – providing direction, supportive service or administration to various components within the school setting, the family, and the community at large to positively influence students' academic, career, and personal/social development.
- Supervision/Administration
  - School Counselor – providing direct supervision to other school counselors to enhance their professional development, skills, and abilities while at the same time, assuring the quality of service and safety of the student clientele
  - Programmatic – manage and administer the daily and yearly operations of the school counseling program

School counselors are faced with a difficult job and often times ones duties are dictated by principles, other administrators, or other factors unrelated to a school counselors' preparation and training (Coy & Sears, 1991). A common scope of practice for school counselors provides a foundation and a direction to who school counselors are and what school counselors do in the school setting. This general school counselor scope of practice can serve as a template for school counselors to create their own scope of practice unique to their school, district and state but in line with common school counselor preparation standards, legislative requirements at the state level and national standards for school counseling programs.

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